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# Former CIA agent says eliminating agency would make U.S. and world a safer place

By Richard Hoops

Including the Central Intelligence Agency in federal budget cuts would sit well with former CIA agent John Stockwell.

"I think we could close the CIA down and the United States would be stronger and safer," Stockwell said. "We don't need the CIA. Not only don't we need it, we've made the world a more dangerous place."

Stockwell, a 13-year-veteran of the agency he calls "the secret police," visited the Twin Cities Thursday on a speaking tour that coincides with showings of the film "On Company Business," a documentary on CIA activities around the world.

"Covert action is a very serious disease in this once-free society," Stockwell said at a press conference. "And you can't stop that activity without stopping the whole nature of our government, the whole nature of our society."

Stockwell joined the CIA in 1964. He served in Vietnam and, during the mid-1970s, was task force commander of a CIA attempt to influence the outcome of the civil war in Angola. He resigned in 1977 and has since written two books: *In Search of Enemies*, a non-fiction account of CIA covert action, and *Red Sunset*, a novel set in Africa.

The Central Intelligence Agency has a strong and resilient life of its own outside legislative influence, Stockwell said. And that power, he added, goes all the way into the White House.

"I see president after president coming into office being skeptical of the CIA and then being lulled over," he said. By compiling dossiers on new presidents, controlling material used in White House briefings, and exerting influence within the major political parties, the agency has been extremely successful at "selling itself" to presidents, Stockwell said.

"No president—or his party—is going to survive if he's serious about doing in the CIA," Stockwell said. "No president can go up against them and survive."



Photo/Joel Ernst

## John Stockwell

The aims of the Carter and Reagan administrations have not conflicted seriously with the CIA, Stockwell said.

"Carter's policy was to rehabilitate the CIA," Stockwell observed. "But he knew what was going on. He was not a Ronald Reagan—on vacation half the time."

Stockwell criticized the Reagan administration for loosening restraints on the CIA, especially in regard to covert action in Nicaragua.

"Reagan is a cowboy looking for a fight," Stockwell said. "Behind his smile, he has some very cruel, insensitive instincts."

The CIA's bureaucratic tendency toward self-perpetuation is playing a vital role in the increased military spending advocated by the Reagan administration, Stockwell continued.

"They propagandize the American public, the world, and the president," Stockwell said. And the rationale for that propaganda is as old as the agency, he said.

When the agency was formed after World War II, it was justified as protection against a Soviet threat to American security, even though the Soviet Union had been decimated by World War II, Stockwell said. The rationale for its creation was shaky, he said, but the agency pursues the same logic today.

"The CIA is the most effective and busy secret arm of the government to perpetuate the view of a hostile